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Sophie Maruéjouls-Koch

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1 "Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence" ("The Timeless World of a Play", 61), Tennessee Williams wrote this in 1951. He was talking about his play *The Rose Tattoo* then, but the statement encapsulates his conception of art as a means of freezing time, as a means of fighting against what he called an "awful sense of impermanence" (61) that never stopped haunting him. Writing plays was one way of doing this, the other was painting. For Williams was a playwright *and* a painter. He drew and painted pictures throughout his life. Now housed in archives, museums or private collections across the United States, these pictures invite us to see his dramatic work in a new light. Hidden as they are from public view, they show another side of the playwright, a side that has somehow escaped the attention of critics and scholars alike, who keep considering his graphic and pictorial work as a minor activity, unworthy of any in-depth analysis. Through the comparative study of two of his late plays, *Vieux Carré* and *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, with two of his paintings, I intend to demonstrate that Williams's paintings are not mere illustrations of his plays, but that they take part in a creative process that feeds on images to reach that region where the frontiers between text and image collapse. Often talking about the limits of the written text, Williams used images to release words from their conventional referents and unsettle the fixity of meaning. His images accompany his plays, both echoing and extending their meaning like deceptive mirrors in which the spectator gets lost. Like his

dramatic texts, especially the late ones, they convey a sense of "intense immobility" that is the artist's way of "beating the game of *being* against *non-being*" (61).

Capturing the passing of time: putting life into a picture

2 Williams started doodling when he was a child. Waiting in his dad's office, he made sketches to fill the void of idle hours, already using artistic creation as a way of making the passing of time more bearable: "I suddenly remember myself a kid of 9 drawing pictures in Red Goose sample books, waiting in Dad's office" (Williams 2006, 255). The sketches and doodles scribbled in the margins of his early texts reveal that images were there from the beginning, inseparable from his writing and essential to his creativity. Later in his life, he turned to painting and made pictures that sometimes evoke his life, sometimes his plays and sometimes both, for Williams never really distinguished his life from his art: both were always intimately connected and the autobiographical dimension of his plays, short stories and poems is a subject that has been largely covered. At the end of his life, the autobiographical element was even held against him and his late work was often considered as the pathetic babble of a no-longer-successful artist:

> "Personal," "self-indulgent," and "sentimental"—like the reviewers' evaluation of Williams' work, these adjectives are typical of the critics' evaluation in the later years of his career. William J. Free (writing in 1977), illustrates that for the second half of Williams' career both reviewers and critics were essentially of the same mind. Drawing on the responses of both these groups, he states that "Critical dissatisfaction over Tennessee Williams' plays of the seventies has been almost unanimous." (Saddik 33)

3 *Vieux Carré* and *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* may therefore not have received the critical attention they deserved. Quite significantly, both plays were begun in the late thirties and their evolution spans the entirety of Williams's career. Both were completed and staged at the end of his life only—1977 and 1981 respectively—and both were considered as pale imitations of *The Glass Menagerie*, the memory play that launched his career in 1945. Although it is true that in *Vieux Carré* and in *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, the playwright goes back over his past, returning to a genre he had already successfully explored, his memories are not filtered through several layers of subjectivity as they are in *The Glass Menagerie*. Instead, they simply materialize on stage like ghosts with the exaggeration that characterizes the late Williams. With complete disregard for the demands of realism, the playwright resuscitates his memories onstage, blending different periods of his life with the fictional worlds of his former works. In both plays, Williams intertwines past and present, life and art, combining movement and stasis to achieve a synthesis echoed by two of his paintings, also made at the end of his career. The first one is an untitled painting dated 1977.[1] Its motifs and its composition reveal its connection with *Vieux Carré*. The characters depicted—the male and female prostitutes waiting in the streets, the lovers embracing in their room or the strange cat that seems to be spying on them—seem to be the visual transpositions of the tenants living in the rooming house described by Williams at the beginning of his play:

> The stage seems bare. Various playing areas may be distinguished by sketchy partitions and doorframes. In the barrenness there should be a poetic evocation of all the cheap rooming houses of the world. This one is in the Vieux Carré of

> New Orleans, where it remains standing, at 722 Toulouse Street, now converted to an art gallery. (*VC* 827)

The "sketchy partitions and doorframes" mentioned in the stage directions find an echo in the frames of the doors and windows that create pictures within the picture on the painter's canvas. Theatricality is further expressed through the poses of the characters, all frozen in stylized attitudes suggestive of the sensuousness of life in the Vieux Carré, the French Quarter of New Orleans where Williams spent a few months in 1939. The cat lying above the window that serves as a frame for the two naked lovers embracing in the foreground appears to be the author in disguise as is made clear in the play by the words of the Writer who explains that "writers are shameless spies" (*VC* 887). The picture-within-the-picture composition of the painting confines the figures represented in small, square-shaped areas that function as visual transpositions of the rooms in which the characters of the play live. Like the walls that separate them in the play, these areas divide space on the canvas, creating vignettes of life. In those small, lighted areas, movements are arrested and turned into theatrical poses. Life suspended becomes an object of contemplation. The pictures within the picture are frozen moments, they belong to different periods of Williams's life and work. The painter brings them all together and the playwright makes them coexist on the stage. The Christ-like figure visible in the top left corner of the painting, for instance, is a reference to an early short story entitled "The Angel in the Alcove" in which Williams writes about his grandmother. She died before he left for New Orleans and the story is about how her ghost haunted him at a time when he had troubles coming to terms with his homosexuality. The ghost of the grandmother also appears in *Vieux Carré* the play, first as an accusing and then as a redemptive vision. As for the lovers embracing in the foreground, they evoke the two-dimensional versions of Jane and Tye, the tragic lovers of *Vieux Carré* who resemble in many ways the characters of Blanche and Stanley in Williams's best-known play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

4 Williams's creative process is one that feeds on itself and the way the untitled 1977 painting evolved through the years reveals how this idea also applies to his pictorial work. The origin of the painting can be traced back to an undated pencil drawing of the outside of the rooming house on Royal Street where the young Williams lived in 1939. The combination of sketches and scribbled comments that cover its surface gives it a cartoonish, comical quality which, interestingly enough, has disappeared from the painting. On the left, a self-portrait of Williams as a young man can be seen along with the following handwritten remark: "Tennessee, in riding boots with bicycle". Opposite the self-portrait, on the far right of the drawing, a male figure, identified as "rough trade" by Williams's caption, appears to be waiting for customers. Both figures are standing on a sidewalk that runs through the picture, two oblique lines connecting its extremities and creating a link between two characters who are not only separated by the space that stands between them but also by time. For what Williams sketched in this picture is the inevitable passage from innocence to experience and the realisation that his homosexuality could be not only acknowledged in a place like New Orleans, but also freely lived. New Orleans is the place where Thomas Lanier Williams became Tennessee Williams. There, the somewhat still naïve and inexperienced young writer came across a reality that liberated his sexual as well as his creative energies:

> Life was a stark contrast to what he had come to know in St Louis, Columbia, or Iowa City, or had known years before in Clarksdale or Memphis. At first, the Quarter shocked him, though not unagreeably so. He wrote in his notebook that

> first night, "Here surely is the place that I was *made* for if any place on the funny old world" [...]. After a *nuit blanche* of house-hopping, Williams recalled the next day in his notebook as having been introduced that evening to the "artistic and Bohemian life of the Quarter with a bang!", something he would later recount in interviews (perhaps erroneously) as his first homosexual encounter with a paratrooper stationed in New Orleans. If "Tennessee" had just been a name only a few days before, he was now becoming flesh and blood, and Williams began exploring freely the limits of his sexual and social nature, searching for it in nearly every bar, curio or pawn shop of the Quarter. (Bak 72)

As early as 1939, when the sketch of Royal Street was most probably made, Williams created pictures that told stories, thus trying to give a permanent shape to the passing of time. Already, his line was used as a means of tracing the contours of forms as well as letters. The mixture of pencilled sketches and words that characterizes the Royal Street picture does not only evince the influence of comic strips on Williams, it also reveals how intricately connected language and image were for him, how both were about drawing lines, or rather, about making a shape and meaning emerge out of the chaos of empty space. Williams's written comments on the two main figures are ways of identifying them. Like the lines that define their contours, they name them, thus singling them out as unique and distinct from the other figures in the sketch. And yet, this freezing function of the line, which is the power to arrest time and confine it into one single meaning, one single shape, is counterbalanced by the profusion of elements that suggest a meeting between the two separate figures of the young Williams and the male prostitute. The circle identified as a "glory hole" at the centre of the drawing and the homosexual imagery that it evokes, the mouse chasing the cat on the street, or the smaller circle representing "one tear shed by lover" that echoes the "glory hole," are but a few examples of the way Williams fills the space separating the two figures with elements conveying the sense of an impending sexual encounter, creating a movement towards fusion that the two circles echoing each other at the centre of the picture symbolize. Thus, within this cartoon-like picture, a story unravels. It is the story of a predatory, sexual encounter that is not utterly devoid of sentiment as the shed tear seems to testify. But it is also the story of an artist struggling to put time into a frame, to draw a line around the immensity of life.

5 It is therefore no coincidence if the Royal Street sketch, which was drawn on the pages of a notebook, spreads over two pages, breaking through the limits of the frame in what appears to be an attempt at destroying the defining power of the line, a defining power associated with language and naming, which, like the outlines delimiting forms, are means of arresting time. A closer look at the scene the two main figures standing on the sidewalk seem to be witnessing, shows the remains of a human body identified as the "crushed figure of a queen who became annoyed with a truck". The streak of blood oozing from the face of the figure together with the scattered objects surrounding it and identified by Williams's captions as "lipstick, rouge, broken mirror and Vaseline" reveal the inside both of a life and a body that now spreads over the picture, literally and symbolically representing an explosion of limits, a breaking through lines. In this light, the accident in the foreground both prefigures and actualizes the meeting of the two characters standing on each side of the painting. It is the ultimate fusion that ends the story, a moment happening in the now of the picture, that functions as a prediction. The past, the present and the future are thus shown simultaneously through a series of visual echoes and correspondences.

6 What makes the Royal Street sketch a key to understanding Williams as a playwright and as a painter is that it is an artistic statement about the difficulty of capturing the completeness, the wholeness of experience. It reveals how Williams uses the line as a way of giving shape and meaning to the chaos of life, to its inevitable movement towards fusion, which is a dissolving of limits and a melting into otherness. Fusion can be achieved either through love or through death. Williams's whole œuvre is traversed by this move towards an impossible fusion. It is the movement of time as desire and it is what breathes life into his plays as well as into his pictures. The defining function of the line as contour of forms and letters is therefore constantly threatened in this early sketch. Remains of it are visible in the 1977 painting through the frames and contours that turn the rush of time into a series of frozen, theatrical scenes. These vignettes of life are what is left of the comic strip. Inside each of them, the figures represented, instead of being clearly identified by captions, float on the surface of the canvas like ghosts, at times referring to imaginary characters, at times evoking real people, creating a maze in which the spectator gets lost. Of the written comments, almost nothing remains except maybe some hieroglyphic signs visible on the wall in the foreground. Like the figures framed by windows and doors, they are traces of meaning, empty signs haunted by ghosts. This is how language and image meet in Williams's work, in that shared space of uncertainty inhabited by traces of a lost presence. There, between words and images, the playwright/painter finds a way of encapsulating the entirety of experience, of putting his whole life into a picture. Only through the power of the image, which is the power to express "a totality of meaning" (Nancy 30), could he achieve this.

7 Totality and simultaneity: both notions also seem to have been on Williams's mind when he wrote *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*. In that play too, one of the three main characters is a writer haunted by his past who says retrospectively, after seeing the apparition onstage of people he loved and lost, that "life is all—it's just one time. It finally seems to all occur at one time" (*SC* 59). One time, one place to contain the meaning of a whole life... That seems to have been Williams's project at the end of his career when he experimented more and more with language, when his writing led him into new territories, when the writer and the painter began to share their modes of expression. Unlike the setting of *Vieux Carré*, there are no walls on the stage of *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, the setting is the memory of a beach in Provincetown where the young Williams met his first male love, Kip Kiernan. The way Williams describes the setting in the stage directions appears to be a verbal transposition of the painting he made in 1980, just one year before the first production:

> SET: A time and sun-bleached shack on dunes rolling upward like waves of pale sand-colored water, occasionally, sparsely, scattered with little clumps of light green beach grass. The large windows have no panes, the front and side walls are transparencies, and there is no door, just the frame. Part of the roof is missing. Adjoining this somehow poetic relic of a small summer beach house is a floor, a platform, all that remains of a probably identical beach house that was demolished more completely by a storm. Shimmering refractions of sunlight from the nearby sea play over this dreamlike setting.
> The setting itself should suggest the spectral quality of a time and place from deep in the past: remembered, specifically, from a time forty years later. (*SC* x)

8 The three figures hardly visible on the painting are reminiscent of the three main characters of the plays, namely August the writer, Kip, a young dancer who is dying of a brain tumour, and a young woman, Clare, who serves as a go-between in the men's sexual transactions. The strange threesome, together with the shimmering light that imbues

everything with a dreamlike, ethereal quality, prepare the spectator for the parade of ghosts that is going to follow.

9 As in *Vieux Carré*, these ghosts come from Williams's life and work: they are lost lovers, greedy producers or temperamental actresses and their comings and goings on the dunes give a specific rhythm to the play, making us enter a place where time is anachronistic rather than chronological, where the past coexists with the present. Putting life into a picture therefore appears to be achieved through a piling-up of different periods, through a superimposition of past and present events that Williams called "double exposure":

> KIP: How much do they pay you? For your play?
> AUGUST: They don't pay much. [...] They want the last act rewritten, but I won't write another word until they take out the regular hundred-dollar option. I have guts now. But I also had them then.
> KIP: Now? Then?
> AUGUST: Present and past, yes, a sort of double exposure.
> KIP: I don't understand. (*SC* 37-38)

The term refers to a photographic technique by which two images can be shown at the same time, in the same picture. Eve Adamson, who staged the first production of *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* in 1981, saw the "double exposure" device as a key metaphor of the play. She explained it in her productions notes:

> The cloudy and clear of the title refer literally to the eyes of August, the central character. A cataract makes his left eye appear cloudy. (Tennessee had a cataract in his left eye and underwent several operations for it in the 1940s.) A photographic double exposure could also be described as cloudy and clear, and double exposure is the key metaphor of the play.
> Two times, two selves, two sensibilities exist simultaneously in August. But also, hovering around and permeating the entire dramatic poem, is the double exposure of Tennessee Williams: the artist and his art, the man and his theatrical persona, immediacy and retrospect, time stopped and time flowing.

For—and this is what the verb "permeate" suggests in this quotation—in *Something Cloudy, Something Clear* as in *Vieux Carré*, Williams does not merely indulge in a montage exercise meant to present the spectator with a series of pictures/stills taken from his life. This is precisely what the paintings reveal: time stopped and time flowing, stasis and movement, past and present are but two aspects of the same reality. As such, they cannot be separated or put into different pictures. They blend and mingle into the work of art, blurring our vision and understanding, making us blind so that we can see.

Cloudy and clear: breaking through the frame

10 The setting of *Vieux Carré*, with its walls, partitions and doorframes, is in fact not so unlike the dunes of *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*. In the rooming house depicted by Williams, conversations are overheard and smells constantly filter through the walls, making privacy or intimacy impossible. The porous walls, like the sandy dunes of the Provincetown beach, do not thwart communication but facilitate contacts and exchanges. They are the pathetic, useless limits that cannot confine the characters to their rooms. Like the lines and contours meant to freeze the figures of the painting into poses, they are fragile frontiers that cannot contain the rush of life within a limited area. For, in the plays as well as in the paintings, Williams deliberately makes his lines and separations sketchy, blurring our vision until it becomes difficult to distinguish one shape from

another, one character from another. In *Vieux Carré*, for instance, the rooming house is so dimly lit that the characters repeatedly stumble on things or bump into one another. There, in the darkness, misunderstandings and transfers of identity occur, creating a state of confusion that reaches its climax at the end of the play, when the character of Jane dies:

> WRITER: Jane didn't seem to hear me. She was looking up at the skylight.
> JANE: It isn't blue any more, it's suddenly turned quite dark.
> WRITER: It was dark as the question in her eyes.
> JANE: It's black as the piano man playing around the corner.
> WRITER: It must be after six. What's the time now?
> JANE: Time? What? Oh. Time. My sight is blurred. (*She shows him her wristwatch*.)
> Can't make out the luminous dial, can you?
> WRITER: It says five of twelve.
> JANE: An improbable hour. Must have run down.
> WRITER: I'll take it off. To wind it. (*He puts the watch to his ear*.) I'm afraid it's broken.
> JANE (*vaguely*): I hadn't noticed.—Lately—I tell time by the sky. (*VC* 897-898)

11 At that moment, past and present overlap and Jane's eyes turn the color of the sky. Williams creates here what George Didi-Huberman refers to as a "crystal of time" (117), that is, an image in which past and present come into a "constellation" (117), suspended, so to speak, in a poetic moment that breaks with the sequential ordering of linear, homogenous time. This moment is totalizing in its effects, it is memory condensed, synthesized into an image. Yet, at the same time, this image is dynamic, or dialectic, to use a term Didi-Huberman borrows from Walter Benjamin, which means that there is a sense of movement and change in it. This is achieved visually in the passage I quoted, through the use of color. The darkness of the sky Jane is looking at seems to contaminate everything on the stage: her eyes, the piano player and finally her vision itself... Everything turns dark until it becomes impossible to see, until space and time—our usual frames of reference—blend into one another to finally dissolve into the immensity of the sky, the only point of reference left when watches have run down. Thus, in the end, there is an image, that of the sky, dark as Jane's future and inevitable as death, the infinite darkness into which everything will eventually be swallowed up, dissolved into an indeterminate nothingness. In *Vieux Carré*, Williams gives us only a glimpse of it at the end of the play, when the playwright puts the finishing touches to his piece and presents the spectator (and the reader) with a moment suspended between life and death, between stasis and movement: the moment before dissolution.

12 If we look closely at the 1977 painting, we can also sense (and see) the presence of death. Williams uses here another natural element—water—to undermine the stability of the image created. The street that divides the painting into two parts looks indeed a lot like a river about to overflow, an impression underlined by the umbrella visible on the left of the painting. The thick, erratic layers of white, diluted paint that run through the picture like an ominous waterfall threaten to cover the whole surface of the canvas. They convey a sense of movement to the painting, connecting the background and its solitary figures framed by windows and doors to the foreground where the lovers are locked in an embrace: two figures merging into one. Water thus appears as the materialization of time as desire, as the inevitable move towards fusion that the 1939 sketch of New Orleans already announced. For water is a recurring symbol in Williams's dramatic work, it is both purifying and frightening, a harbinger of death as well as a promise of redemption. Its underlying presence in the painting thus takes on the same symbolic dimension as that of the sky in the play: it foreshadows the imminent dissolution that awaits the

figures represented. It is the image of a future that already pervades life. In Williams's late paintings, it is used not only as a figurative element but also as an integral part of the creative process.

13 In the 1975 painting entitled *She Sang Beyond the Genius of the Sea*,[2] Williams used turpentine to dilute his colors on the surface of the canvas. The result is that of a watercolor painting. The effect produced by the extreme clearness of the picture is, again, that of near blindness. The contours of the three figures that can hardly be distinguished by the spectator seem to be about to dissolve into their surroundings. Williams thus gives visual shape to the elusiveness of life, to its essential evanescence. What he manages to capture here is the intensity of the vanishing moment. The last words of August, the writer of *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, reveal the same artistic preoccupations. Addressed to the spectator, they are an invitation to create a picture that looks very much like the 1975 painting:

> AUGUST: See how light the sky is? Light as clear water with just a drop or two of ink in it. Note to end on? How did it go, that bit of Rilke? "The inscrutable Sphinx? Poising forever—the human equation—against the age of magnitude of a universe of —stars..." The lovely ones, youthfully departed long ago. But look [*He points*] very clearly here, and while this memory lives, the lovely ones remain here, undisfigured, uncorrupted by the years that have removed me from their summer. (*SC* 85)

Sky and sea, past and present, female and male bodies blend together in the haziness of a picture on the verge of dissolution, an image that is both still and fleeting, intense in its very fragility.

14 In the painting, the time distance separating the present from the remembered vision is rendered through the transparency of colors and the absence of line delimiting the contours of shapes. On the surface of the canvas indeed, the figures are defined only by a color contrast opposing the white glow of the moon to the yellow brightness that seems to emanate from the woman's face in the foreground. As a central motif, she strikes the viewer as being quite a mysterious figure. Examined more closely, she appears to be a combination of at least three mythological characters: Medusa, Poseidon and Hades. Her blazing hair and monstrous face indeed link her to the Gorgon while the trident she is brandishing above her head relates her to the god of the seas as well as to the god of the underworld. Her malevolent nature is further reinforced by the presence of a small winged devil, perched on her trident and as bright as her yellow hair. He, too, is looking straight at the spectator. His position at the top of the painting, right next to the pale white moon, creates a parallel between the two light sources of the image: the moon and the sun, white and yellow light, both radiating around the woman's face, as if she herself was the sun, another god, but cosmic this time. Interestingly, the same link is established in the play through the way Williams describes Clare who serves as an intermediary between August and Kip, the two male characters: "Now on the dunes appears a young girl, Clare, also apparitionally lovely. She bears a wicker basket, and her long hair matches in color the refracted sunlight from the sea" (*SC* 1).

15 As a hybrid figure, half woman and half monster, the woman of the painting combines contradictory identities in a reversal of the symbolical meanings conventionally attributed to the (female) moon and the (male) sun. Her enigmatic presence blurs the conventional notions of genders and codes, a semantic blurring which is translated visually through the extreme clearness of the painting. And, once again, the contours of the body represented dissolve, giving way to a multitude of references, mythic and

cosmic, which finally melt into one single symbol: that of Christ crucified. For the woman is not just carrying the trident: it is actually piercing her hands. In addition, the shape of her body connects the upper and the lower parts of the painting. Like the cross, her body is a meeting point, a passageway between two worlds. Even her ambiguous appearance places her at a crossroads, in an indeterminate and indefinable interval where past and present, self and other, can meet. Curiously, the trident that cuts through her hands has two similar ends. The same shape is thus repeated on both sides of the painting, creating a mirror effect which is further emphasized by the presence of the two male figures standing in the left and right parts of the painting. Both seem to be tied to the end of the trident, as if suspended from it. The two male bodies therefore appear to be the incomplete fragments of one single being. Their postures are identical except that one is facing the spectator while the other is turned in the opposite direction, as if the painter had tried to show both the front and back view of the same body, the visible and the hidden side of one being. As the center of a mirror in which the two opposite sides of the self can be united, the woman of the painting functions as an interface. Her wounded, monstrous body is both strange and familiar, an uncanny center where the notions of sameness and difference blend, invalidating the distinctions between self and other. Like Clare, the woman of the painting serves as a link between the two male figures. But what this strange goddess embodies above all is Williams's conception of art as a shimmering surface reflecting an ideal unity, an impossible fusion.

16 But this analysis would be incomplete if it did not mention the only thing that is clear, literally speaking, in this painting, namely the title: "She Sang Beyond the Genius of the Sea". As the first line of a complex poem in which Stevens wonders about the meaning of art, it further extends the painting's potentialities of meaning, thereby increasing the tension between word and image. As a reference inscribed in the painting, the poem is both a reflection upon art, and another mirror of the play. The story it tells is that of a woman singing on a beach. Her song fascinates the poet and his companion. Stevens's poem might give us answers about the role and meaning of art as Williams envisions it. For the voice that mingles with the sound of the breaking waves does not only order the chaos of the world, but it is described by the poet as the very condition of its existence:

> If it was only the dark voice of the sea
> That rose, or even colored by many waves;
> If it was only the outer voice of sky
> And cloud, of the sunken coral water-walled,
> However clear, it would have been deep air,
> The heaving speech of air, a summer sound
> Repeated in a summer without end
> And sound alone. But it was more than that,
> More even than her voice, and ours, among
> The meaningless plungings of water and the wind,
> Theatrical distances, bronze shadows heaped
> On high horizons, mountainous atmospheres
> Of sky and sea.
> It was her voice that made
> The sky acutest at its vanishing. (Stevens 128)

Intense in its very evanescence, the artistic moment for Williams is always a poetic one. Suspended at it is between past and present, stasis and movement, it is time "crystallised," as Didi-Huberman has it, and time crystallised is time turned into space, it is a trace or an echo, an image about to disappear but still the remain of a presence. Williams's plays and paintings are those fading-away prints. As drifting, unstable signs,

they blur the distinctions between language and image, turning figures into signs to be read and words into unrecognizable shapes. The printed letters of the title inscribed within the frame of "She Sang Beyond the Genius of the Sea" are a case in point: four of them are almost invisible, clear as the figures represented on the painting. Like the evanescent figures floating on the surface of the canvas, they stand at the crossroads of absence and presence, of death and life, in the magic interval where art can fuse with life and thus defeat death:

> FELICE: This empty vault is full of echoes and echoes and echoes. (*Out Cry* 821)
> WRITER: They're disappearing behind me. Going. People you've known in places do that: they go when you go. The earth seems to swallow them up, the walls absorb them like moisture, remain with you only as ghosts; their voices are echoes, fading but remembered.
> [*The clarinet calls again. He turns for a moment at the door.*]
> This house is empty now. (*VC* 901)

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NOTES

1. Untitled, 1977 (last accessed October 24, 2017).
2. She Sang Beyond the Genius of the Sea, 1975 (last accessed October 24, 2017).

ABSTRACTS

"Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence", Tennessee Williams wrote in 1951 in an essay devoted to *The Rose Tattoo,* entitled "The Timeless World of a Play" (61). What the statement reveals is the American playwright's conception of art as a means of fighting against the passing of time, against the "awful sense of impermanence" (61) that never stopped haunting him. But the stage is not the only place where, as Williams wrote in the same essay, "time is arrested in the sense of being confined" (61). The sketches and paintings he made throughout his life reveal the same obsession with time, the same desire to freeze the intensity of the moment into the work of art. Two paintings, made in 1975 and 1977, shed new light on two of his late plays, *Vieux Carré* and *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*. Written at the end of his life, both plays are attempts at capturing the totality of experience. In them, Williams intertwines past and present, life and art, combining movement and stasis to achieve a synthesis his paintings echo, or mirror, though in a very different way. The examination of these unknown paintings in relation to the plays is meant to engage us in a dialogue between texts and images. What the dialogical perspective reveals is a temporality that is circular rather than linear, anachronistic rather than chronological. Williams the painter and Williams the playwright blur the limits of space and time to reach that region where the distinctions between text and image collapse as one becomes the mirror of the other, its "horizon," as Jean-Luc Nancy writes in *Au Fond des images*. There, words fail and figures dissolve; there, silence and haziness confront the reader/spectator with the timelessness of art, not as something eternal or transcendent, but rather as a magic interval where the intensity of the vanishing moment can be captured. In the scripts of his plays as well as in his paintings, Williams faces us with the mystery of time, with an elusiveness that he considers as the only true essence of his art. Through a comparative analysis of two of his paintings with two of his late plays, I intend to show how the verbal and the visual interconnect in Williams's art, how his texts as well as his paintings convey a sense of "intense immobility" that is the artist's way of beating "the game of *being* against *non-being*" (Williams 2009, 61).

« Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence » : Tennessee Williams écrivit cette phrase en 1951 dans un essai intitulé « The Timeless World of a Play » (61). L'affirmation met au jour une conception de l'art comme moyen de lutter contre le passage du temps, contre une « affreuse sensation d'impermanence » (61) qui n'a jamais quitté le dramaturge. Or, la scène n'est pas le seul endroit où, selon Williams, « le temps, soudain pris au piège, s'arrête » (61). Les dessins et tableaux qu'il réalisa tout au long de sa vie trahissent la même hantise du temps qui passe, le même désir de fixer l'intensité du moment dans l'œuvre d'art. Deux tableaux, peints en 1975 et 1977, permettent ainsi de porter un regard nouveau sur deux pièces écrites à la fin de sa carrière. Intitulées *Vieux Carré* et *Something Cloudy, Something Clear*, elles ont ceci de commun qu'elles apparaissent comme des tentatives de capturer la totalité d'une existence, d'enfermer la petite éternité d'une vie dans les limites de la représentation. Dans chacune d'elles, Williams mêle le passé et le présent, la vie et l'art, combinant les notions de mouvement et de stase pour opérer une synthèse dont ses images peintes sont l'écho, ou, pourrait-on dire aussi, le miroir. L'analyse de ces deux pièces au prisme de deux peintures méconnues de Williams invite à un dialogue fructueux entre les textes et les

images. De cette approche dialogique émerge une temporalité plus circulaire que linéaire, plus anachronique que chronologique. Williams le peintre et Williams le dramaturge brouillent les limites spatio-temporelles pour créer ce lieu intermédiaire où les distinctions entre texte et image s'annulent, l'un devenant le miroir de l'autre, son « horizon d'interprétation », pour reprendre l'expression de Jean-Luc Nancy. Là, les mots manquent et les formes s'évanouissent ; là encore, le silence et l'indistinction confrontent le spectateur à l'intemporalité de l'art, non pas comme quelque chose d'éternel ou de transcendant, mais plutôt comme un intervalle magique où l'intensité du moment fuyant se révèle, comme une évanescence capturée dans les mailles de la représentation. Dans les textes de ses pièces, comme dans ses tableaux, Williams met le spectateur/lecteur face au mystère du temps, de ce temps objet d'une quête artistique vitale dans une œuvre où les images n'ont jamais cessé d'accompagner les mots.

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Keywords: American theatre, painting, word/image
oeuvrecitee Vieux Carré, Something Cloudy-Something Clear
Mots-clés: théâtre américain, peinture, texte/image

AUTHORS

SOPHIE MARUÉJOULS-KOCH

Sophie Maruéjouls-Koch defended her PhD thesis on Tennessee Williams's "plastic theatre" in November 2014. She examined the influence of the visual arts (painting and cinema) on Williams's writing and devoted the last chapter of her thesis to the playwright's unknown sketches and paintings housed at the Harry Ransom Center (Austin, Texas). She now hopes to publish a book on Williams's graphic and pictorial art in collaboration with professor John S. Bak. She published articles in *The Tennessee Williams Annual Review*, *Modern Drama* and *Transatlantica.* She is Assistant Professor (Maître de Conférences) at the University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès.